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Mahathir-Schools

FEDERAL GOVT LOOKING FOR WAYS TO TAKE OVER RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 3 (Bernama) -- The federal government will look for ways to take over the people's religious schools in Kelantan in the interest of the students, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The prime minister said the government felt that the people's religious schools in the country needed to be upgraded because they lacked facilities and trained teachers.

"This is not good for the development of children who seek knowledge in the field of religion," he said when asked to comment on the Kelantan PAS government's reluctance to allow the Education Ministry to take over the people's religious schools in the state.

"But PAS doesn't care about all this. It wants to use religious schools to teach children to hate the government, hate the prime minister," Dr Mahathir said after a private visit to the Butterfly Farm in Taman Tasik Perdana, here.

He said the Barisan Nasional government was responsible to the people, not PAS.

The Education Ministry had proposed to take over all the people's religious schools in the country to improve their facilities and Islamic education system.

However, Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat said in Kota Baharu last Thursday that the PAS government would not hand over such schools to the federal government because the ministry had no experience in running them and it feared that their education quality would drop.

Nik Aziz, who is also PAS advisor, had said that the ministry could only take over such schools in Kelantan if it had more experience than the state government.

Asked to comment on this, Dr Mahathir said: "He says God used vulgarities, is that experience?".

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Khalid Yunus said yesterday that the ministry was not forcing the Kelantan government to hand over the people's religious schools in the state.

He said the ministry did not intend to politicise education and hoped that the PAS government would make the sacrifice for the development and upgrading of such schools.

The butterfly garden Dr Mahathir visited was opened in 1993 and taken over by KL Butterfly Garden in 1997.

Its chief executive, C.T. Fong, told reporters that the company planned to change its name and upgrade it to KL Butterfly Garden to be on par with the Royal Butterfly Garden in the United Kingdom besides making it the biggest in the world.

He said the RM3 million upgrading exercise to turn it into a one-stop centre for tourists was expected to be completed by 2001.

The garden currently receives about 200 visitors a day.

-- BERNAMA

RA JK